

**STATEMENT OF KATHERINE STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF CULTURAL RESOURCE, STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 2534 TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF THE LOWER LOS ANGELES RIVER AND SAN GABRIEL RIVER WATERSHEDS IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 13, 2002**

---

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on this bill to study the lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel watersheds in the Los Angeles Basin.

The Department does not oppose the bill. However, the Department did not request additional funding for this study in Fiscal Years 2003. We believe that any funding requested should be directed towards completing previously authorized studies. Presently, there are 37 studies pending, of which we expect to transmit 7 to Congress by the end of 2002. To meet the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog, we must continue to focus our resources on caring for existing areas in the National Park System. Thus, we have concerns about adding new funding requirements for new park units, national trails, wild and scenic rivers or heritage areas at the same time that we are trying to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog. As such, the Department will identify all acquisition, one-time and operational costs of the proposed site. At this time, those costs are unknown.

In addition to H.R. 2534, Congressman Adam Schiff has introduced H.R. 2715, a bill to evaluate and study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Rim of the Valley Corridor as a unit of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. These bills affect nearly adjacent territories in the Los Angeles basin and affect nearly identical large constituencies. As any study would include a public involvement component, combining the planning effort to evaluate both areas would not only be less confusing to the public but also more cost-effective for the government. Since a study of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers is estimated to cost approximately \$500,000, there could be considerable efficiencies gained

by combining and narrowing the focus of these two proposed studies.

While some familiar with the Lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds may think of them as concrete-lined ditches, the rivers provide an important opportunity for low-impact recreation for many urban residents in adjacent communities. Several successful efforts have already been undertaken to provide bikeways and hiking areas along the river's banks. Additionally, small tracts of green space have been acquired to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in the form of playgrounds for children, picnic areas, benches for rest and respite from the urban environment and for areas to walk and bicycle. Many areas have been replanted with a variety of native vegetation to enhance the local environment.

This study will assess habitat quality, access to urban open space, low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife and habitat restoration and protection and watershed improvements along the Los Angeles and San Gabriel watersheds as well as the Valley of the Rim corridor surrounding the San Fernando and La Crescenta Valleys. This latter corridor consists of portions of the Santa Monica Mountains, Santa Susanna Mountains, San Gabriel Mountains, Verdugo Mountains, San Rafael Hills and the connector to Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forests.

The National Park Service has some familiarity with the region and these watersheds. Our National Park Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program continues to have interaction with communities along the Los Angeles River and has provided technical assistance for outdoor recreation potential. Additionally, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area provides protection for 153,750 acres while providing recreational opportunities for approximately 530,000 visitors annually.

The watershed of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers contains important natural resources, which are disappearing in Los Angeles County. The continuous greenbelt corridors serve as habitat for breeding, feeding, resting or migrating birds and mammals, while allowing migration to take place around and

amongst the urban areas. The higher reaches of the watershed also contain significant examples of rock outcroppings, as well as native vegetation.

This area has a rich cultural heritage, which is evident by the approximately 9 properties within the boundaries of the study area on the National List of Historic Places and 96 properties on the state register of historic places. These properties weave a rich tapestry of the cultural history of the area and include Mission San Gabriel Archangel, the mission founded in 1771 by the Spanish missionaries who were moving up the coast of California; Mission San Fernando Rey de Espana, founded in 1797; Merced Theatre, the first building built expressly for theatrical purposes in Los Angeles, dating back to 1870; Lummis House, constructed by Charles F. Lummis, an author, editor, poet, athlete, librarian, historian and archeologist during his life from 1859-1928; Los Encinos State Historic Park, used as a headquarters by the Franciscan padres before they built Mission San Fernando; Angeles Flight Railway, which was an incline railway built in 1901 to carry residents up the hill from the downtown shopping district; and Alvarado Terrace Historic District, which includes 12 buildings displaying prime examples of architecture and social history from 1900-1924.

The Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watershed is adjacent to the Angeles National Forest and contains state, county and local parks within. The recreational experience would be heightened by the establishment of trail connections and linkages for the urban populations of Los Angeles, as well as for visitors. These connections would also allow users to leave the populated areas and connect to the prime natural areas in the region. These trails would be used for hiking, mountain biking, nature study and bird watching.

A study will outline public-private partnerships, which are core to preserving large tracts of open space such as are included in this study. The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) was established as an independent State agency within the Resources Agency of the State of

California in 1999. It was established to preserve urban space and habitats in order to provide for low-impact recreation and educational uses, wildlife and habitat restoration and protection and watershed improvements. The RMC has brought diverse groups together to work in partnership to protect the precious resources within these two watersheds.

Any study that is undertaken along the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers will involve extensive public meetings, extended comment periods and more complex analyses because issues and options in a large, urban area with such a diverse and extensive group of stakeholders at all levels of government would be considered.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this issue and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have on this issue.